

# Holi

## The Festival

Celebrated since ancient times in agricultural areas to throw off the darkness of winter and welcome the light of spring, is the colourful Hindu festival of Holi. Holi is always celebrated following the full moon in the month of 'Phalguna' in the Hindu calendar, so its date varies but it usually falls between February and March in the Gregorian calendar (the most widely used calendar across the world).



As well as celebrating the beginning of springtime, Holi also commemorates various events in Hindu mythology. One of these is the legend of a demon king. The name Holi is thought to come from Holika, the sister of the demon king, Hiranyakashyap. In Hindu mythology, Holika is said to have been burned in place of Hiranyakashyap's son Prahlad, who had been sentenced to death by his father for worshipping the Hindu god Lord Vishnu. Prahlad survived and so Holi is also seen as a time to celebrate good overcoming evil.

Unlike many other Hindu holidays, Holi, which is a national festival now celebrated across India, is mainly a time where people can relax with no religious requirements or prayers. The festival itself is celebrated over two days: the first day is known as **Holika Dahan** and the second as **Rangwali Holi**. Each day is associated with different activities, with the main focus being on having fun!



### Holi Celebrations

During Holi, one of the main characteristics is the relaxing of social expectations usually associated with Hindu cultures. This means that people mix regardless of age, gender or wealth and behaviour expectations are also relaxed, resulting in an enjoyable but often chaotic atmosphere. It is common to hear people saying, "**Buran a mano, Holi hai,**" during Holi, which means 'don't be offended, it's Holi.'

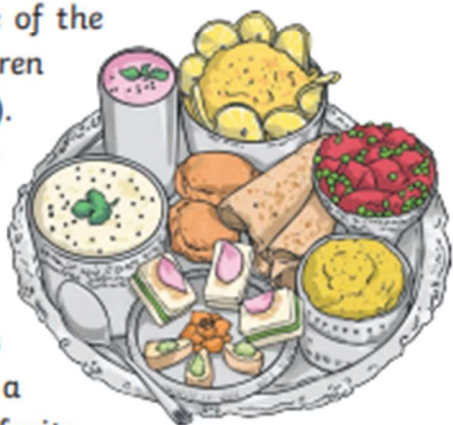


On the evening of Holika Dahan (the first day of the festival), a public bonfire is lit (often in an unorderly way) to celebrate the victory of good over evil.

For the weeks leading up to Holi, people traditionally collect waste wood from their neighbourhood for the fire, which is lit between 10 p.m. and midnight (when the moon rises). It is a time when everyone joins together in the street creating lots of noise. People also perform religious rituals, asking for forgiveness from their god and praying that any evil will end.

During Rangwali Holi (the second day of the festival), the colourful part of the celebration occurs when people parade through the streets throwing coloured paint and water bombs over each other; many adults wear a white kurta (a traditional Indian tunic-style top) and carry some of the dried powder called gulal with them, while children tend to be armed with pichkaris (water squirters). Rangwali Holi is also a chance for friends and family to get together to sing, dance and have fun. Holi usually ends in the late afternoon when everyone goes home to wash and change clothes before visiting friends and relatives. Delicious feasts are prepared for sharing, including **Gujiya**, which is a

sweet delicacy stuffed with dried fruits, nuts and other sweet treats.



### Holi around the World

Now an international festival due to the movement of Hindus around the world, Holi has altered according to the country within which it is being celebrated.

#### Nepal, Asia

In Nepal, Holi (also known as Phagu Poonima) is also celebrated as a national festival on the same date as the Indian Holi. Traditional music concerts are held in most cities along with many of the same fun and games that take place in India during Holi (although there is less of a focus on having bonfires as in India).

#### Guyana, South America

When forced (indentured) workers from India arrived in Guyana in the nineteenth century, they took Holi with them as most were Hindus unwilling to give up their faith. However, over the years, Holi has changed to have a unique Caribbean-

Indian feel with traditional Indian Chowtal music (Hindu folksong with singers and a drummer) combining with creole influences (music of African origin with a variety of instruments including drums). As with most Holi celebrations, it is customary to wear old white clothes with the expectation that they will not remain white for long!

### **Berlin, Germany, Europe**

Held annually in the German capital, Berlin's Holi Festival of Colours is a modern take on the traditional Hindu festival. Holi Festival of Colours, Berlin, is an electronic music festival, combining DJs from around the world with the colourful powder paint of Holi. Bringing together people from all backgrounds,



### **Did You Know...?**

Traditionally, Holi paint was made with natural ingredients, such as turmeric or sunflowers mixed with extracts of Neem (Indian Lilac) and Bilva (wood apple) to create a naturally coloured paste. Modern times have seen more people using dyes and synthetic chemicals, which are easier and cheaper to produce, but many people worry about the negative effects of these chemicals on people and the environment.